

**Board Chair:****James Holt****Executive Director:****Marcia L. Nash****Contact Information:**

1 Willis Circle

Graniteville, SC 29829

Phone: (803)-663-5604**Fax:** (803)-663-0069**E-mail:****mnash@scfirststeps.org****Total children in county
under age 6: 11,218****Total Children in county
living in poverty: 19.3%****Aiken County Highlights**

- Aiken County First Steps received a community grant in the amount of \$500 from the Aiken Junior Women's Club for an Early Education Forum.
- Jessie Lott, Home Center Director, received her Associates Degree in Early Childhood Education. Congratulations Ms. Lott!

Aiken County

First Steps Partnership

Fiscal Year 2009 Annual Report

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Aiken County First Steps (ACFS) Partnership Board to School Readiness has worked diligently over the past decade to prepare children from day one to grade one to begin first grade healthy and ready to learn. We have been ensuring that limited resources for Aiken County's children are dedicated to **quality** services whose impact on readiness is well-documented in research; by being **accountable** for strengthening the focus on student outcomes, data, and research; by building more rigorous **collaborations** among ALL school readiness partners to leverage existing resources and strengthen systemic improvements. The **leadership** of those that laid the First Steps foundation and those that will follow ensures decisions will continue to be made with key stakeholders in a timely, data-driven manner to assure quality services to children.

In Aiken County, nearly 1 in 5 births are to a mother under 20 years of age and 1 in 4 children are born to a mother possessing less than a high school diploma. These alarming statistics suggests that it is very likely that these children will be retained or score at the "below basic" level (PACT) by third grade. The need to fill these critical gaps was the driving force behind our commitment to focus on the child and family.

During FY' 2009 Aiken County focused on family strengthening (which included a Parent's as Teachers program and a Fatherhood program), child care quality, assistance and training, and early education with the majority of our resources. We also provided services for prenatal women.

Our First Steps programs are making a tremendous difference for our youngest citizens and their families. Many families have been strengthened with High School Diplomas and GED's; improved social and job skills; children with delays have been included in the regular classroom setting; four-year-olds are a part of a quality learning environment that says "this is the place for me"; and several childcare centers have raised their standard of quality care. We believe that the integration of home-school-community partnerships will empower all parents to give their children the best possible start in life.

Keep Children First!**Marcia L. Nash****Executive Director****Aiken First Steps**

First Steps to School Readiness Strategy Areas

The First Steps initiative approaches children's school readiness needs in five ways:

Family Strengthening: A parent is a child's first and best teacher. First Steps works to help parents become the best parents they can be. First Steps also helps parents further their own education.

Healthy Start: Children's development and ability to learn are profoundly impacted by their health in the earliest years. First Steps works to help families understand children's health needs through education and screenings while also working to help them access needed health services.

Quality Child Care: Quality child care provides immediate and long-term learning benefits for children. First Steps works to expand the availability of quality child-care to families and to enhance the level of quality in existing child-care environments.

Early Education: Research shows that children who participate in high-quality preschool classes are more likely to start school ready to learn, as well as be more successful later in life. First Steps works to expand high-quality 3-year-old and 4-year-old kindergarten opportunities in public and private settings.

School Transition: The transition into kindergarten is a critical time that sets the tone for children's perspectives about the school years, as well their parents' perspectives. Making a strong initial connection between school and home -- and supporting both parents and students during this transition time -- has been shown to impact students' later school success and parents' later involvement during the school years.

2008-09 County Partnership Programs by Strategy

FAMILY STRENGTHENING

Parents as Teachers (PAT)

Program description: Parents As Teachers (PAT) (also know as Born to Learn©) is an early childhood parent education and support program designed to empower all parents to give their children the best possible start in life. PAT offers home visits by a certified parent educator; group meetings where parents get together to share their experiences; periodic screenings of overall development, language, hearing, and vision; and a resource network of services in Aiken County.

Program results:

- 20 Families were served.
- 100% of the total clients served during FY09 were identified as possessing one or more priority risk factors as required by the South Carolina First Steps Board of Trustees.
- 45% of families assessed made positive gains on the Keys to Interactive Parenting Scale (KIPS).
- Certified 0-3 and 3-K PAT Parent Educator

Fatherhood (FSFF)

Program description:

Fathers are a primary source of socialization; they influence family processes and their positive involvement can be beneficial for child well-being. Paternal participation in fatherhood programs has the ability to impact the well-being and functioning of fathers as individuals as well as their families. As we continue to strive to succeed at giving fatherhood an equal chance, *FSFF* will continue to increase the involvement of fathers in their children's lives by helping them to appreciate that they are important to their child's healthy development and that unemployed, unwed, and separated fathers can still interact with their children, contributing significantly to their well-being.

Program results:

- 25 fathers served.
- 60%: custodial fathers; 40%: non-custodial fathers.
- 90% received parent education monthly.
- 100% of the participants recognize the importance of being a 24/7 Dad.

HEALTHY START.

Non Home-Based Services (Healthcare)

Program description: Aiken County First Steps recognizes that there is a need to provide prenatal services to women who do not have access to medical services or prenatal education. Providing services for prenatal women will promote healthy behaviors of mothers and assure a healthy start for the unborn baby. The goal of this strategy is to target prenatal women in their first trimester to receive early prenatal care and provide prenatal education. The strategy involves recruiting and enrolling prenatal women who are not eligible for Medicaid, do not have private insurance for comprehensive services, do not have access in affordable quality health care and who fall below 250% of poverty. The prenatal services include lab testing, prescriptions, one ultrasound, approved special procedures, prenatal education, postpartum and translation services for non-English speaking families.

ACFS provided the Color Me Healthy Curriculum to improve the health of children between the ages of 4 to 5 years old. The curriculum is designed to provide fun, innovative and interactive learning opportunities on physical activity and healthy eating. Color Me Healthy uses color, music and exploration of the senses to teach children that healthy food and physical activity is fun. ACFS partnered with DHEC, Clemson Extension and local childcare centers.

Program results:

- 21 adults; 352 children.
- 100% of the families were non-English speaking.
- 100% received early, ongoing prenatal services.
- 98% of infants born weighed over 5.5 pounds.
- 100% of children enrolled in 17 childcare centers participated in the Color Me Healthy Curriculum

QUALITY CHILD CARE

Childcare Quality Enhancement

Program description: Much of the long-term economic payoff from public investments in high-quality preschool programs will come through decreased crime and delinquency. Quality childcare serves to provide parents with access to the support they seek to promote the optimal development of their preschool aged children. Aiken County First Steps is committed to the overall school success of both young children and their families to make certain that the above risk factors are not a reality. Childcare centers that were a part of this strategy enhanced their services by allowing an appropriate pre-and post environment rating scale assessment and technical assistance training in areas of deficiency as noted by the environment rating scale and participate in childcare trainings that are designed site-specific to the needs of their childcare establishment.

Program results:

- 6 Childcare Facilities served.
- 221 technical assistance hours provided.
- 100% the participating facilities received the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) pre and post assessment.
- 80% of the child care centers received a monetary incentive from the ABC for increased program quality.

Childcare Training

Program description: Aiken County First Steps provided continuous training as it pertained to the needs of the quality enhancement center's action plan and any known deficiency as prescribed by the appropriate environment rating scale. Trainings provided were delivered by Certified Trainer as credentialed by the Center for Child Career Development. Trainings were coordinated with other local entities, i.e. Childcare Resource and Referral, Aiken Technical College, United Way/Success by Six, Aiken County School District and local faith-based organizations. Sustained and intensive efforts supported providers in the advancement of their status on the Center for Childcare Career Development career lattice.

Program results:

- 15 workshop training sessions provided.
- 329 workshop staff trained.
- 25.5 workshop training hours received by staff trained.
- All staff served received the required DSS Certified training hours.

Childcare Scholarships

Program description: Aiken County First Steps recognizes quality child care as a research-based determinant of school readiness. As such, we collaborated with parents, the child-care community and its agencies and community partners to maximize child care quality throughout the county. Particular emphasis was placed on assisting parents in their efforts to identify those settings most likely to maximize developmental outcomes, and assisted providers in their own efforts to maximize the learning environments they provide for young children.

Program results:

- 17 children served.
- 100% of the families served were identified as having at least two or more risk factor.
- 100% of the participating parents strongly agreed the services provided were beneficial to them and their family.

Childcare Resource and Referral

Program Description: Child Care Resource & Referral provided services in Aiken, Edgefield, and Saluda Counties. Services were coordinated to facilitate accessibility, affordability, and quality of child care for parents and their children; support and guidance to enhance child care providers' ability to achieve higher performance standards; and to partner with community agencies to advocate for improvements and support of early care and education.

Program results:

- 8.5 training hours were provided to 73 childcare providers.
- 68 technical assistance hours were provided to childcare providers.
- 1,500 books and resources were distributed in the community

EARLY EDUCATION

4 Year Old Kindergarten

Program description: Aiken County First Steps leveraged state, local and private resources to increase the quality of, and number of children participating in developmentally appropriate pre-kindergarten programs in both the public and private sectors. Particular emphasis was placed on fidelity to research-based instructional models and targeting of students at-risk of early school failure. Research continues to confirm that quality preschool programs make a difference. High-quality early learning experiences help children start school ready to succeed and are comprised of physical, social, emotional and cognitive skills. Children need a comprehensive approach including all four skill areas to ensure future success.

Program results:

- 58 total children were served at Greendale, Oakwood Windsor, and Ridge Spring Monetta Elementary Schools.
- 100 % of children enrolled in the 4-K program met the “at risk” criteria.
- All ACFS funded programs met South Carolina 4K requirements for curriculum, pupil-teacher ratios, materials and class size.
- 98% of parents participated in workshops; 100% of parents volunteered in the classroom.
- As a result of First Steps funding, an additional 4K class was made available.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Expenditures By Funding Source	
State Appropriation (<i>Fund 10</i>)	\$322,666
State Appropriation (<i>Fund 11</i>)	\$7,649
E.I.A. Appropriation (<i>Fund 55</i>)	\$37,598
E.I.A. Appropriation (<i>Fund 56</i>)	\$103
State Private (<i>Fund 15</i>)	\$6,111
Local Private (<i>Fund 20</i>)	\$12,105
Federal (<i>Fund 30</i>)	\$108,239
In-Kind (<i>Fund 25</i>)	\$179,658
TOTAL:	\$674,129

Expenditures By Program / Strategy Name	
Parents As Teachers (PAT)	\$32,637
Fatherhood Initiative	\$30,717
Full Day 4K	\$387,484
Childcare Quality Enhancement	\$18,263
Childcare Training	\$17,741
Childcare Scholarships	\$25,472
Childcare Resource and Referral	\$29,830
Healthcare	\$53,956
Countdown to Kindergarten	\$2,762
Indirect Programmatic Functions	\$36,138
Administrative Functions	\$39,129
TOTAL:	\$674,129

NOTABLE DONORS

<i>DONOR'S NAME</i>	AMOUNT
Aiken Junior Woman's Club	\$500
Cedar Creek Ladies Club	\$100
Chandler Law Firm, P.A.	\$250
Children's Trust Fund of SC	\$6,429
Dollar General Literacy Foundation	\$15,000
United Way Aiken County	\$2,000
United Way of the Midlands (CCRR)	\$29,261
TOTAL:	\$53,540

Local Match Percentage for FY 2009: 83.18%
(at least 15% Legislative requirement)

COUNTY PARTNERSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES

AIKEN COUNTY FIRST STEPS BOARD MEMBERSHIP

James Holt, Chair	Category 2
William Price, Vice Chair	Category 1
Geneva Jackson, Treasurer	Category 1
Shirley von Beck, Secretary	Category 1
David Walker, Chair, Nomination/ Personnel Committee	Category 1
Cherell Williams, Chair, Family Strengthening Committee	Category 1
Paula Simmons, Chair, 4K Early Education Committee	Category 2
Vernel Taylor, Chair, Child Care Committee	Category 1
Jessie Ford, Chair, Health Care Committee	Category 1

Jennie Beck	Category 2
Tracy Brown	Category 1
Gwendolyn Byrd	Category 1
Thomas Devine	Category 1
Peggy Ford	Category 3
Herlaysia Hagwood	Category 1
Shadie Hall	Category 1
Linda Harmon	Category 1
Nina Hazen	Category 1
Perijetta Hightower	Category 1
Angela Johnson	Category 1
Rebecca Koelker	Category 3
Debbie Lotz	Category 2
Mary Mason	Category 1
Rhonda Patterson	Category 1
Teresa Patterson	Category 2
DeAnna Risher	Category 3
Taris Simmons	Category 1
Kealya Terry	Category 1
Myra Tomajian	Category 1
Charolette Webb	Category 1

AIKEN COUNTY FIRST STEPS STAFF

Marcia L. Nash, Executive Director
Sandra Blocker, Administrative Assistant
Denise Buckle, Parent Educator, Parents as Teachers Program
Terri Whetstone, Early Childhood Specialist, Child Care Programs
Karen Abraham, Healthcare Coordinator, Healthcare Programs

COUNTY DATA SNAPSHOT

In FY09, First Steps County Partnerships statewide made it a priority to become increasingly data-driven. County Partnerships successfully began using powerful new components of the First Steps data system, and County Partnerships also utilized data in new ways to drive their FY09 program plans. In addition to enhanced program data tracking, County Partnerships are also focusing on the best available data about children and families to best understand their communities' needs. At the end of FY08 and the beginning of FY09, County Partnerships began an extensive analysis of this data, including data about the risk factors known to impact children's potential school success, such as low birth weight, teen mothers, and families living in poverty. A county-level risk data report is included in the subsequent pages of this report.



2008 School Readiness Risk Profile

Aiken County

Total Children Under Six: 11,281

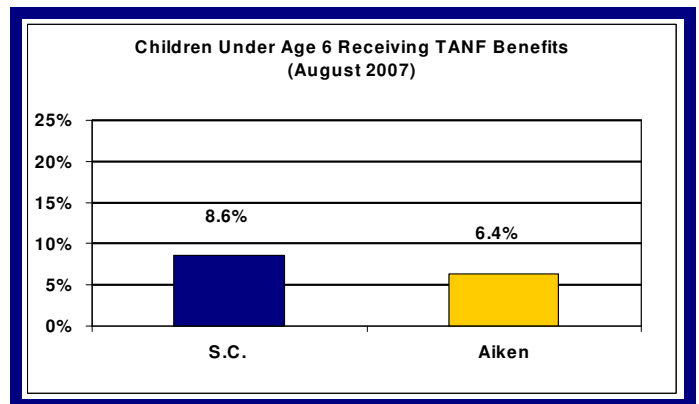
CHILD POVERTY (Children in Families Receiving TANF Benefits)

Statewide Average (2007): 8.4%

Aiken County (2007): 6.4%

Fast Fact: Roughly 1 in 15 Aiken County children has an annual family income equivalent to \$10,325 (or less) for a family of four. A recent statewide analysis suggests that 45% of these children will be retained or score at the “below basic” level (PACT) by third grade.

- Children in deep poverty often face a wide variety of school readiness obstacles, ranging from inadequate prenatal care and nutrition to low maternal education.
- 723 of Aiken County’s 11,281 children under age 6 received federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits during 2007, indicating a family income at or below 50% of the federal poverty definition.



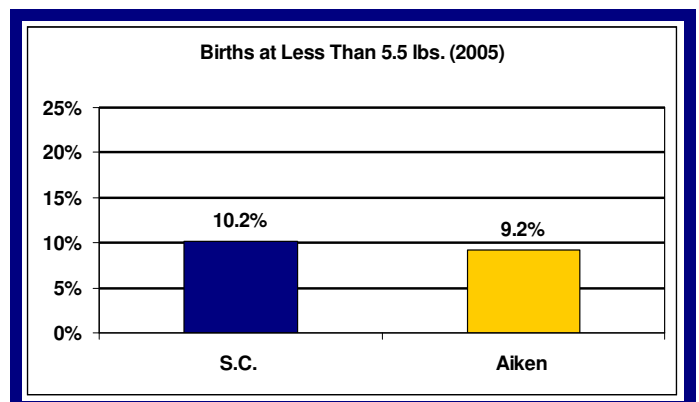
CHILDREN AT LOW BIRTH WEIGHT (Less Than 5.5 lbs.)

Statewide Average (2005): 10.2%

Aiken County (2005): 9.2%

Fast Fact: Roughly 1 in 10 Aiken County children is born at a weight less than 5.5 lbs. A recent statewide analysis suggests that at least one-third of these children (36%-52% depending on weight category) will be retained or score at the “below basic” level (PACT) by third grade.

- Babies born at low weights are often prone to developmental delays associated with early academic failure.
- Many have received inadequate prenatal care and suffer from significant health complications.
- 170 of the 1,847 children born in Aiken County during 2005 weighed less than 5.5 lbs.



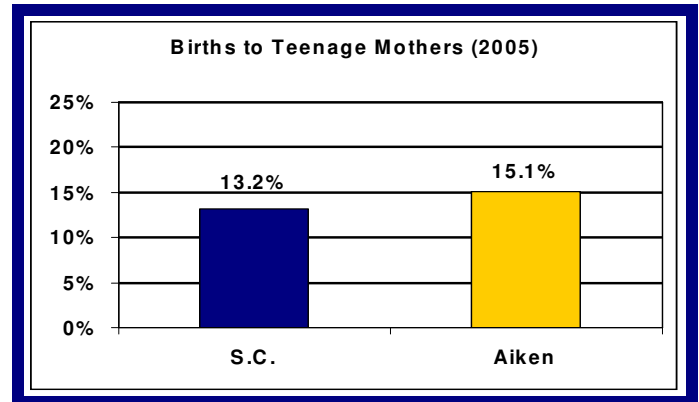
BIRTHS TO TEENAGE MOTHERS

Statewide Average (2005): 13.2%

Aiken County (2005): 15.1%

Fast Fact: Nearly 1 in 5 Aiken County births is to a mother under 20 years of age. A recent statewide analysis suggests that 43% of these children will be retained or score at the “below basic” level (PACT) by third grade.

- Teenage parents often lack the maturity and knowledge required to optimally fulfill important parental responsibilities, are less likely to advance their own educational attainment and often fail to advance beyond low-income status.
- 279 of the 1,847 children born in Aiken County during 2005 had teenage mothers.



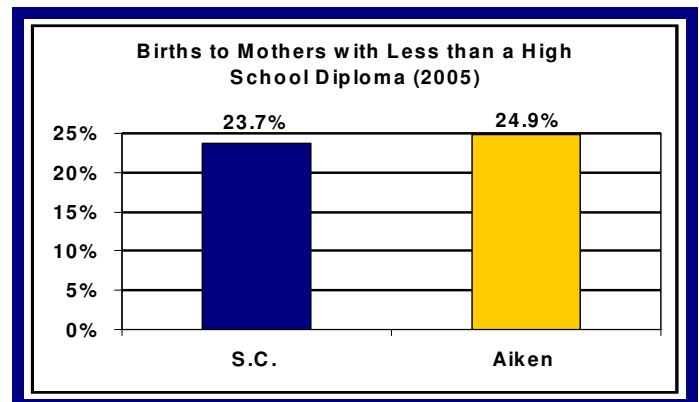
BIRTHS TO MOTHERS WITH LESS THAN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

Statewide Average (2005): 23.7%

Aiken County (2005): 24.9%

Fast Fact: 1 in 4 children in Aiken County is born to a mother possessing less than a high school diploma. A recent statewide analysis suggests that roughly half (48%) of these children will be retained or score at the “below basic” level (PACT) by third grade.

- Research suggests that a mother’s own educational attainment is closely linked to the subsequent academic performance of her children.
- 459 of the 1,847 children born in Aiken County during 2005 had mothers with less than a high school diploma.



All data provided by the SC Budget and Control Board’s Office of Research and Statistics

The SC General Assembly created in 1999 the South Carolina First Steps to School Readiness Initiative as a “comprehensive, results-oriented initiative for improving early childhood development by providing, through county partnerships, public and private funds and support for high quality early childhood development and education services for children by providing support for their families’ efforts toward enabling their children to reach school ready to learn”...here's what happened next:

First Steps Strategy Areas	Notable Moments
Family Strengthening Parents As Teachers Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nationally trained Parent Educator; Dollar General Literacy Foundation grants increased program participation, numbers served, and collaborative efforts.
Quality Child Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased collaboration efforts of early care and education agencies. Implemented quarterly <i>Parent Focus Groups</i> for parents of scholarship children.
Early Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First Steps funding allowed for the implementation of additional full-day 4K classes.
Countdown to Kindergarten School Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% of parents reported that the summer visits played a significant role in their children’s success in 5K.
Non-Standard Strategies Fatherhood Initiative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fatherhood Initiative: Implemented <i>First Steps for Fathers</i> in 2006 through a grant from the Children Trust Fund of SC. Currently, we have 3 additional FSFF programs in Aiken County.
Healthcare Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided prenatal services to

	<p>over 300 women including prenatal education classes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented the <i>Color Me Healthy</i> Curriculum to focus on childhood obesity and teaching health lifestyles.
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Other notable moments:

During Fiscal Year 2009, investments of local private, federal, and in-kind leadership support has allowed us to leverage First Steps funding of approximately 300,000 in Aiken County. These dollars support all Aiken County First Steps programs.



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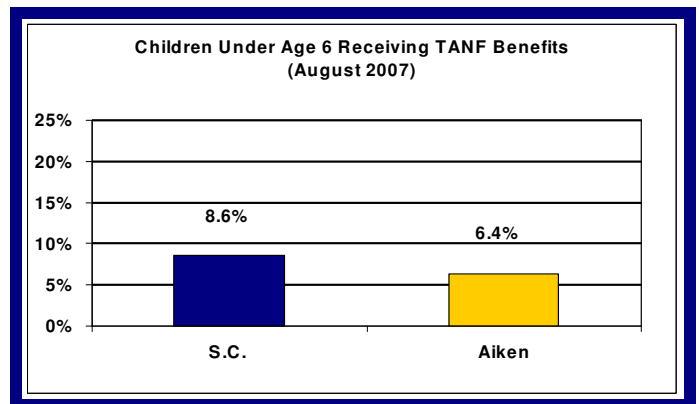
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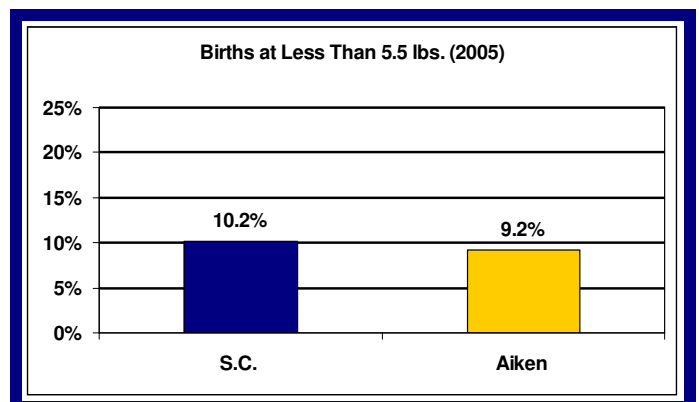
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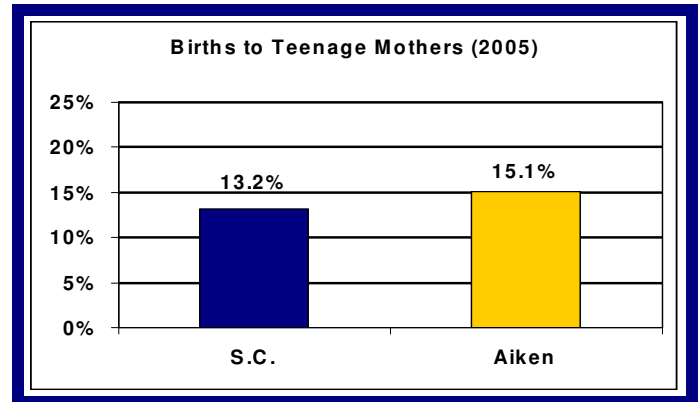
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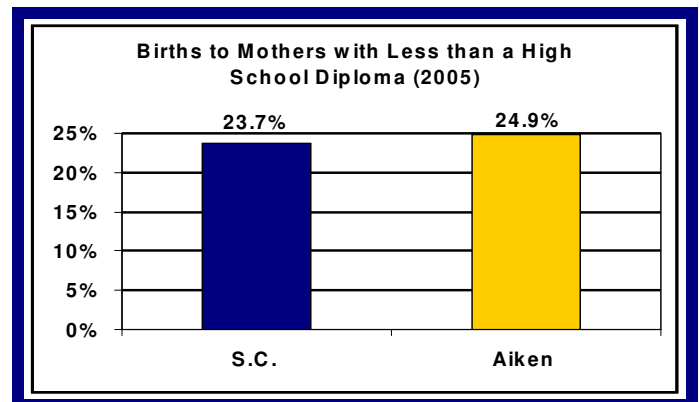
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